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ABSTRACT

While empathy has been defined as the single most important dimension in establishing a counseling relationship, no studies have clearly defined what counselor responses are perceived as empathic by African American clients. For clients in general, the use of Ivey and Authier's microcounseling attending and influencing skills has been found to increase levels of perceived empathy. This study was conducted to examine the relationship between the level of perceived empathy by an African-American male client and the use of Ivey and Authier's microcounseling skills by 14 counselor trainees. In addition to the African-American client, one white male and one white female graduate student rated perceived empathy as expressed by the counselor trainees. A comparison of ratings between the client and the raters revealed no significant relationship between the white male rater and the African-American male client. There was a significant and positive relationship between the ratings of the white female rater and the client. The findings, in part, supported earlier studies suggesting that the presence of Ivey and Authier's microcounseling skills alone insures higher levels of perceived expressed empathy by judges. None of Ivey and Authier's microcounseling skills, however, were found to significantly contribute to the counselor ratings of the client. Several recommendations are made to employ in replication of the study. There are 30 references and 7 tables. (NB)

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Counselor-trainees' Use of Microcounseling skills and Raters' and Client's Perceived Expressed Empathy: An Investigation of Cross-cultural Counseling Process

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Introduction

Empathy has been defined as the single most important dimension in establishing a counseling relationship (Carkhuff, 1969; Egan, 1986; Gladstein, 1983; Ivey, 1983), particularly with minority clientele (Vontress, 1967, 1970; Wittmer, 1971). Counselors' expressed empathy as perceived by African American clients has been found to influence clients return rates better than counselors' years of professional experience (Banks, Berenson, & Carkhuff, 1967). This finding alone gives credence to the reexamination of empathy in relationship to African-American clientele, who have been found to self-terminate after initial sessions much more frequently than White counterparts (Acosta, 1980; Cole & Pilarek, 1976).

However, close examination of the literature results in the identification of no studies that clearly define exactly what counselor responses are perceived as empathic by African American clientele. For clients in general, the use of Ivey and Authier's (1978) microcounseling attending and influencing skills has been found to increase levels of perceived empathy (Hearn, 1976, Moreland, Ivey, & Phillips, 1973; Toukamanian & Rennie, 1975). These skills also have been found to appear prominently in the factorial structure of empathy (Ivey & Authier, 1978; Zimmer & Anderson, 1968). Though these are critical findings with important implications for training, such do not add understanding to the perceptions of African American clientele, who often bring unique interpersonal and

communication styles to the counseling session (Foster, 1971; Hall, 1976a, 1976b; Staples, 1970; Toldson & Pasteur, 1976). The African-American male was chosen as a focus for this study due to: 1) their current status of being identified as an 'endangered species' (Leavey, 1983; Pederson, 1986; Ponterotto & Casas 1987; Sue, Akutou & Highi; 1985); and, 2) the absence of empirical studies addressing counseling process with this population.

The primary purpose of the present study is to examine the relationship between the level of perceived empathy by an African-American male client and the use of Ivey and Authier's microcounseling skills by fourteen counselor trainees. Because client evaluation and independent judge evaluation of level of empathy expressed by counselors during initial sessions have been found to be unrelated (Barkham & Shapiro, 1986; Burnstein & Carkhuff, 1968; Gross, Curtin & Moore, 1971; Kurtz & Grummon, 1972), and because most counselors in this country are Anglo, one Anglo male and one Anglo female advanced level graduate students were also selected to serve as independent judges to rate perceived empathy as expressed by each of the fourteen counselor trainees. For purposes of this study, empathy was defined as the ability to place oneself in another's situation to achieve a clear understanding of another's experience and perspective.

Method

Participants

Counselor trainees. A total of fourteen counselor trainees participated in the study. The counselor trainees were advanced level masters students enrolled in a summer course entitled Cross-Cultural Counseling. This course was offered in the Department of Counseling Psychology on a large midwestern university campus (population 27,000). Two courses were prerequisites for this class: Counseling Laboratory I, which addressed Ivey's microcounseling skills; and, Counseling Theory and Techniques. The fourteen counselor trainees consisted of one African American woman, one White male, and twelve White females. At the beginning of the semester, counselor trainees were asked to sign up to do a 15-20 minute counseling session. Students were told that this was an exercise to generate discussion about cross-cultural counseling issues and for the purposes of training and future research. No grades were assigned and participation contributed in no way to students' final grades.

The Client. The client was an African American male advanced doctoral student in a non-counseling related field of study. He had volunteered to serve as a client for the Cross-Cultural summer course. He was 25 years old, 6'2", and had an athletic build. The client was from a middle-class family with both parents having completed college. He was a member of a Black fraternity and actively involved in campus politics

and a support group for African American men. Though his primary identity was African American, he did maintain close relationships with members of several other racial/ethnic groups. He was well liked in his departmental program and across campus in general. His annual evaluations by departmental faculty had consistently been positive.

The client was attractive, being neatly dressed and appearing well-groomed. He was articulate and seemed very comfortable in presenting the issue to the counselors. The "client's" presenting problem to all counselors was that he was experiencing racism in the work environment and the frustration he was feeling with this situation was beginning to effect other areas of his life, particularly his relationships with Whites outside the work environment. This presenting problem was a current issue for the client. The client was instructed to respond the way he naturally would to each of the counselor-trainees' unique interpersonal styles.

Independent Raters. Both raters were advanced level graduate students in the counseling psychology program existing within a school of education who volunteered to participate in the study. Advanced level students were chosen in order to decrease the probability of raters having prior relationships with counselor trainee participants that might bias the rating process. The male rater was 28 years old, while the female rater was 24 years old. Both had successfully completed Counseling Laboratory I, (with an emphasis on Ivey and Authier's

microcounseling skills), Counseling Theories and Techniques, and Counseling Practicum; and, had additional professional counseling experiences. Both raters were White.

Procedure

All sessions were videotaped and were scheduled over a one week period with no more than three sessions per day. To avoid client fatigue resulting from the repetition of the same experience more than once, sessions were separated by at least one hour. Counselor trainees were asked not to discuss the sessions' content nor process the experience with others until after all had completed the process. The instructor encouraged all students to relax and to use those skills that had been previously acquired through coursework and experience. Their only instructions were to develop some level of understanding of the client's presenting problem as they attempted to develop rapport with the client to the best of their ability given the time constraints. They were told that the problem did not have to be solved by the end of the session. The trainees knew only that the client would be a member of a racial/ethnic minority group.

The instructor scheduled appointments according to availability and convenience of both counselor trainees and client. The client waited in the lobby until approached by the counselor trainees who were directed to him by the receptionist. None of the trainees had prior contact with the client. Sessions were held in a training room set up with

videotaping equipment.

All students had the opportunity to receive feedback individually from the client regarding the counseling session. One classroom period was committed to the discussion of students' experience of the counseling session.

Typewritten transcripts were made of each counseling session indicating both client and counselor responses. No identifying information was included on the transcripts and each was assigned a number (1-14) in order to facilitate discussion between those with the task of categorizing counselor responses. Ivey and Authier's microcounseling skills were independently identified by one advanced level masters student who had been trained in the use and identification of Ivey and Authier's microcounseling skills and one faculty member that had consistently taught Counseling Laboratory I and II for the past 3 years. Where differences were identified, discussion was made after reviewing the definition of the categories in question. The interrater reliability was .98. The counselor trainee responses which did not appear to fit either of Ivey and Authier's microcounseling skill categories were categorized as 'other'.

The videotapes which were made of the counseling sessions were reviewed independently by the client and the raters. After being shown the chosen definition of empathy, "the ability to place oneself in another's situation to achieve a clear understanding of another's experience and perspective", each

was asked to review the videotapes and rate each counselor trainee's ability to express empathy to the client on a scale from one to nine. One through three were considered low expressed empathy; four to six, medium expressed empathy; and seven to nine, high expressed empathy. The ratings were found to be independent based upon a chi-square analysis ($p<.05$).

Data Analysis

T-tests were used to compare the means across client ratings and those of the two independent raters. Three multiple regression analyses were used in order to examine the contribution of counselor responses as indicated by Ivey and Authier's microcounseling skill categories to the variance in the dependent variable, ratings of expressed empathy by the client, and that of each of the two raters. A fourth multiple regression analysis was used to examine the relationship between the dependent variable, client's rating, and the independent variables, the ratings of the independent raters. Spearman product correlation coefficients were also found in order to examine the relationships among the three raters assessments of the sessions.

Results

Table 1 presents the frequency of counselor responses that were categorized by Ivey and Authier's microcounseling skills. The most frequently used responses were closed ended questions (17.4%), paraphrases (14.9%), use of self (12.5%), and open ended questions (12.1%). The least used responses were

identification of assumptions (.2%), directives (1.4%), and minimal encouragers (2.4%). Thirteen percent of the responses were categorized as 'other'. The longest session consisted of 48 counselor responses, while the shortest session consisted of 17 counselor responses.

Table 2 presents the ratings, means, variance, and standard deviations of ratings of rater #1 (female), rater #2 (male), and the client. T-tests showed no significant differences between mean scores.

Table 3 presents the Spearman product correlation coefficients indicating the relationships between the ratings of rater #1, rater #2, and the client. A significant relationship was found between the ratings of rater #1 (female) and the client ($r=.54$; $p<.05$). No significant relationships were found between rater #1 and rater #2, nor between rate #2 and the client.

Table 4 presents the results of a stepwise multiple regression analysis with the client's rating as the dependent variable and rater #1 and rater #2 assessments as the independent variables. Both independent variables were found to contribute significantly to 63.9% of the variance in the dependent variable, ratings of the client ($r=.79$; $r^2=.639$; $p<.0006$).

Table 5 presents the Spearman product correlation coefficients indicating the relationships between the client's ratings and the counselor trainees' use of Ivey and Authier's microcounseling skills. No significant relationships were found.

As a result of a multiple regression, none of the microcounseling skills were found to contribute significantly to the client's ratings.

Table 6 presents the results of a step-wise multiple regression analysis with rater #1's (female) ratings as the dependent variables and the microcounseling skills as the independent variables. Counselors' use of directives was found to contribute significantly to 31% of the variance in counselor #1's ratings ($r=.55$; $r^2=.31$; $p=.03$). Findings indicate that the more counselors used directions, the higher counselor #1 tended to rate them in terms of expressed empathy.

Table 7 presents the results of a step-wise multiple regression analysis with rater #2's (male) ratings as the dependent variable and the microcounseling skills as the independent variables. Counselors' use of open ended questions and summary, were found to contribute significantly and negatively to 58% of the variance in counselor #2's ratings ($r=.76$; $r^2=.5808$; $p=.001$). Findings indicate that the more counselors used open ended questions and summary, the lower counselor #2 tended to rate them in terms of expressed empathy.

Discussion

Counselors' expressed empathy, though deemed a necessity in the effective development of the therapeutic alliance by most professionals (Carkhuff, 1969; Egan, 1986; Gladstein, 1983; Ivey, 1983), appears to be a very difficult quality to define and identify (Kurtz & Grummon, 1972). Though this study did

examine several different aspects of empathy, findings seem to highlight the complexity of the construct. Empathy appears to be much easier to discuss in written form in the literature than to express in a manner that others can see or experience.

First, these results support in part those of earlier researchers who found client and judge perceived empathy to be unrelated (Barkham & Shapiro, 1986; Burnstein & Carkhuff, 1968; Gross, Curtin & Moore, 1971; Kurtz & Grummon, 1976). Data indicated no significant relationship between the White male rater and the African American client. It seemed that at times when the White male saw empathy on the video, the African American male client agreed that he had experienced empathy, but at other times did not. On the other hand, a significant and positive relationship was found between the ratings of the White female counselor and the African American male client. In fact, 30% of the variance in the client's rating could be accounted for by the White female's rating, while 70% of the client's ratings remained unexplained by any variables examined in this study. Given the potential for discrepancy in perception between the client and a masters level counselor, it would seem particularly important to also attend to the client's perceptions during initial interviews, particularly minority clients who have tended not to return after initial sessions.

One reason for this conclusion is that, contrary to the belief of earlier writers who purport that clients, in general,

are poor judges of interpersonal relationships (Burnstein & Carkhuff, 1968; Hanson, Moore & Carkhuff, 1968; Traux, 1966), many African Americans have been found to have developed a heightened perceptual sensitivity to others' responses to them (Foster, 1971; Hall, 1976a, 1976b; Staples, 1970; Toldson & Pasteur, 1976). For the counselor to automatically discount this ability and proceed as he or she had been taught or as his or her supervisor recommends, could well increase the possibility of premature self-termination. Even in cases where the clients' perceptions are perceived as being blatantly inaccurate, continuing to respond in a way that the client perceives as unempathic would seem futile, particularly during the initial sessions.

In addition, because together both independent raters' ratings were found to contribute to 63.9% of the variance within that of the client's, the accuracy of the evaluation of counselor trainees' counseling sessions by counselor educators could be increased by tapes being reviewed by two counselor educators independently. These findings suggest that dual review could increase the understanding of the client's experience moreso than one reviewer alone. The fact that 36.1% of the variance in the client's ratings remains unexplained by dual and independent review further supports the need to attend to the client's experience during the initial session.

Second, these findings, in part, do support earlier studies that suggest that the presence of Ivey and Authier's

microcounseling skills alone insures higher levels of perceived expressed empathy by judges (Hearn, 1976; Ivey & Authier, 1979; Moreland, Ivey, Phillips, 1973; Toukamanian & Rennie, 1975). For the White female rater, the use of directives was found to contribute significantly to counselor ratings (R^2=.31; p=.03). However, for the White male rater, the more specific microcounseling skills were used, (open ended questions and summary), the lower the counselor was rated (R^2=.58; p=.001). In both cases, a large percent of the rating variance remains unexplained (69% for the female rater and 42% for the male rater). These differences could suggest the possibility of gender differences in how empathy is experienced during counseling sessions (or in interpersonal interactions in general). However, these differences could also only reflect the diversity that exists even among White counselor trainees and practicing professionals. Other factors unexamined by this study appear to influence the perception of both raters in identifying counselors' expressed empathy as well.

Third, none of Ivey and Authier's microcounseling skills were found to significantly contribute to the counselor ratings of the African American male client. One explanation for this finding is that because many African American individuals have been found to attend to nonverbals moreso than Anglo individuals (Hall, 1976a; 1976b), the intent of the counselor's response, as indicated by the specific skill used, would have less impact on the client's experience of being understood than the

counselor's tone and manner. The client's remarks about each counselor seems to support this explanation. Phrases such as, "felt cold and distant" and "seemed scared", were used to describe specific counselors. This suggests that counselors trained in the use of Ivey and Authier's microcounseling skills may or may not use such skills in a manner that would be perceived as empathic or beneficial by the client. Other counselor characteristics, not examined by this study, may also be a critical contribution to the perception of empathy by African American clientele. Video taping sessions of counselor trainees with clients during cross-cultural training might assist in more clearly understanding exactly what these factors are.

The authors believe that replication of this study is definitely warranted and offer several recommendations to future researchers who wish to do so.

First, requesting counselor trainees' ratings of the session would have assisted in identifying the relationships among counselor ratings, those of the client, and the independent raters.

Second, increasing the number of male and female independent raters would have increased the generalizability of these findings. It would also have been very informative to include African American male and female raters in the sample of rater participants.

Third, selecting a sample of African American men from the general population to serve as raters would also increase

the generalizability of these findings. This would be particularly so if varying levels of age, education, and socioeconomic levels were identified. One-half of the African American male raters could be requested to rate the videotapes while the other half would rate only typewritten transcripts of the counseling sessions. Doing so would allow some examination of the relationship between ratings and the opportunity to observe counselors' verbal and nonverbal responses to the client (on videotape) versus when nonverbals are absent (as in the transcript).

Fourth, identifying some code of categorizing and measuring nonverbals counselors used during the session could assist in increasing the understanding of how specific personal characteristics, behaviors, and mannerisms, contribute to the counselor being perceived as empathic by the African American male client.

The authors are aware that all recommendations to improve upon this study's design are very time consuming and therefore costly. However, in order to increase the understanding of the impact of counseling process upon the African American male client, future research endeavors are critical.

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Table 1
Frequencies of counselor trainees' responses by category of Ivey and Authier's microcounseling skills:

OEQ = open ended questions
CEQ = closed ended questions
ME = minimal encourager
ATA = attention to affect
PP = paraphrasing
SMY = summary
DRCT = directions
RFL = reflections
US = use of self
IDAS = identify assumptions
OTH = other category

#	OEQ	CEQ	ME	ATA	PP	SMY	DRCT	RFL	US	IDAS	OTH
1.	6	5	6	3	7	1	1	2	3	0	14
2.	2	8	1	1	3	1	0	3	2	0	9
3.	9	4	1	4	3	2	0	3	5	0	2
4.	2	15	1	1	3	2	0	4	8	0	11
5.	3	8	2	3	5	4	1	9	6	0	1
6.	4	12	0	2	4	1	0	4	5	0	4
7.	7	9	0	5	3	2	1	3	6	0	4
8.	1	3	0	4	4	1	4	7	5	0	5
9.	8	7	0	2	7	6	0	5	4	1	3
10.	4	5	1	3	6	0	0	4	7	0	4
11.	3	4	0	1	4	1	0	6	3	0	2
12.	3	2	0	0	5	1	0	4	2	0	0
13.	4	2	0	0	8	0	0	3	4	0	4
14.	3	1	0	4	11	2	0	11	1	0	1
Total:	59	85	12	33	73	24	7	48	61	1	64
% :	12.1	17.4	2.4	6.7	14.9	4.9	1.4	9.8	12.5	.2	13.1

Table 2 *
Empathy ratings, rating means, variance and standard deviations of raters and client

Rater #1 (female)
Rater #2 (male)

Counselor	Client	Rater #1	Rater #2
1	7	6	4
2	8	6	7
3	2	2	2
4	2	3	8
5	9	7	6
6	3	4	8
7	6	9	7
8	9	9	8
9	4	2	2
10	7	9	8
11	9	5	6
12	8	5	9
13	3	6	8
14	5	7	6
Means:	5.85	5.71	6.35
Variance:	7.05	5.01	5.75
Standard Dev. :	2.65	2.23	2.39

* T-tests results indicated no significant differences between means.

Table 3
Spearman product correlation coefficients indicating relationships between ratings of rater #1, rater #2, and the client
(n=14)

Rater #1 (female)
Rater #2 (male)

	Client	Rater #1	Rater #2
Client	.1077		
Rater #1	.5484*	.3000	

*Significant p<.05.

Table 4
Results of stepwise multiple regression analysis with the client's rating as the dependent variable and rater #1 and rater #2 ratings as the independent variables

Variables	Multiple R	RSQ	Increase in RSQ	Level of Probability
Total of ratings for both #1 and #2	.7999	.6398	.6398	.0006

Table 5
Spearman correlation showing the relationship between counselor responses and the client's overall rating

OEQ = Total number of open ended questions
CEQ = Total number of closed ended questions
ATA = Total number of attention to affect
PP = Total number of paraphrases
SMY = Total number of summaries
RFL = Total number of reflections
US = Total number of uses of self
IV = Total number of Ivey's microcounseling skills
OTR = Total number of 'other' responses

	Client
OEQ	-.4484
CEQ	-.1846
ATA	.0363
PP	.0978
SMY	.0769
RFL	.3901
US	-.2176
IV	-.2165
OTR	-.1341

No significant ($p<.05$) relationships were found. Multiple regression analysis showed none of the microcounseling skills significantly contributed to the ratings of the client.

Table 6
Results of step wise multiple regression analysis with rater #1's (female) ratings as the dependent variable and microcounseling skills as the independent variable

Variable	Multiple R	RSQ	Increase in RSQ	Level of Probability
Directions	.5568	.3100	.3100	.0386

Table 7
Results of step wise multiple regression analysis with rater #2's (male) ratings as the dependent variable and microcounseling skills as the independent variable

Variable(s)	Multiple R	RSQ	Increase in RSQ	Level of Probability
Open-ended question	.7621	.5808	.5808	.0018
Summary	.8344	.6963	.1154	.0656